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SUBJECT: NGO ON APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY IN MOROCCO

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The president of the Moroccan Association of Youth Against AIDS (A.M.J.C.S.) shared his perspective on the political and economic context in which Moroccan NGOs operate. His candid comments about government efforts to appear socially responsive, the disconnect between economic growth and improved social services, and the shortcomings of Morocco's politicians shed light on the overall situation in Morocco. His comments also reinforce the perception that civil society in Morocco, more than the government or political parties, continues to emerge as the driving force behind substantive social change. END SUMMARY

Appearance Versus Reality

¶2. (SBU) When CG and Econoff met with the president of A.M.J.C.S., Abdessamad Oussayh, on January 17, 2007, he cited several examples to show that the GOM is not as responsive to social needs as it would like to appear. As he aptly put it, many ministers are involved on paper, but the reality is different. He said that the Ministry of Justice, which should develop laws to protect people, had signed a human rights decree, but had done nothing in practice. Similarly, the Minister of Education may mention AIDS, but schools have no guide for sex education and the Ministry leaves NGOs such as A.M.J.C.S. to do the real work. Oussayh offered yet another example, saying that the GOM claimed to provide free housing to 200,000 people, when in fact people had paid for their homes. Although the government appears to address social needs, Oussayh feels that it actually does little for the fight against AIDS and similar causes.

¶3. (SBU) In Oussayh's opinion, which he has shared publicly, Morocco's approach to the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) is another social initiative that seems more for show than impact. In an attempt to address human development issues, the King created a structure and put in place people that have little experience with human development. Oussayh argues that it would have made more sense to appoint a qualified manager who would then create an appropriate framework after identifying key issues.

WHY SOCIAL SERVICES FALL SHORT

¶4. (SBU) In explaining why the GOM misses the mark when it comes to social services, Oussayh noted that the government ministers

responsible for such programs live lavish lives that are far removed from the average person's on-the-ground reality. He said a Minister living in a big villa with a pool has no concept of the fact that a family cannot be expected to survive on USD 330 per month, paying for food, water and electricity.

¶ 15. (SBU) Oussayh also noted that Morocco's improving economy is not connected to social service needs, so that the poor continue to be left behind. To illustrate his point, he noted that Morocco has an insufficient program for retirees. As a result, young Moroccans who could benefit from the growing economy are forced to devote their resources entirely to their families, making it impossible to save for the future. Oussayh maintains that, "you cannot develop a country that way," failing to link economic growth with improved social services.

POLITICAL PARTIES ALSO NOT WHAT THEY SEEM

¶ 16. (SBU) Just as the government appears to be more responsive than it is, Oussayh contends that politicians in Morocco are not what they would seem to be either. In fact, he says, "in Morocco, there are no politicians, just people who search for power." He said that while the Justice and Development Party (PJD) has an ideology and does small things to help people, they do not respect or listen to others. He is concerned about how a religious party would treat Morocco's citizens ten years from now, given that it would not benefit non-Islamic segments of the population. In general, Oussayh lamented that Morocco's political parties lack innovation, keeping the same people in power for years instead of allowing others to bring a fresh perspective.

PROGRESS NONETHELESS-----

¶ 17. (SBU) Despite an environment that is less supportive than it appears on the surface, A.M.J.C.S. is a thriving NGO with an array of programs targeting vulnerable groups including students, sex workers and working children. The organization is run like a business, and volunteers receive extensive training before being commissioned to represent A.M.J.C.S. as trainers and educators. The organization receives most of its funding from The Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, although some also comes from UNAIDS and various government ministries. On the whole, Moroccan society is receptive to messages about HIV/AIDS awareness, with the exception of some Islamists and conservatives. Far from being negative, Oussayh is an upbeat man who believes strongly that the patience and perseverance of youth will ultimately provide solutions to Morocco's challenges.

¶ 18. (SBU) COMMENT: Oussayh's perspective on Morocco's political and economic reality reinforces the growing perception here that the force of social change rests with civil society more than the government or political parties. The latter often seem remote and unconnected with real issues, from the perspective of many in Casablanca. Oussayh's views also underscore the point that Morocco's successful efforts to promote economic growth need to be connected with bolder initiatives to improve social services in order to have the desired effect. END COMMENT.

GREENE